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Statement submitted by Priests for Life, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Priests for Life believes that groups most excluded in today's world are urgently in need of social protection policies if the goal of Agenda 2030 to leave no one behind is to be achieved. The groups most in need of social protection span the life cycle, beginning with the child (who, as the Convention on the Rights of the Child reminds us, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth), the disabled and the elderly.

Priests for Life believes that inclusivity in human rights applies to all human beings, no exception, from conception to natural death, and the intrinsic dignity of life is the foundation of social protection policies. Social inclusion ought to extend to all members of the human family during all stages of life.

The need for social protection is especially critical for the preborn baby girl who is identified as female and whose life is lost through sex selection abortion. Imbalanced sex ratios at birth demonstrate the dangerous lack of social protection policies for girls in the prenatal stage of life and are a sign of a global failure to protect the most vulnerable girls from the most lethal form of discrimination — sex selection abortion.

Research and data from countries most affected by sex selection and resulting imbalanced sex ratios at birth, India and China, reveal unprecedented social and economic inequalities and challenges due to the large number of missing women and girls. The failure to protect the lives of girls in the womb leads to additional failures to protect women and girls from the troubling consequences that follow — increases in kidnappings, rapes, sex trafficking and prostitution, bride-selling, and child marriage.

Unless concerted action is taken to protect infant girls in the womb, sex imbalances at birth are not only expected to continue but to rise compounded by access to prenatal sex determination testing kits and access to drugs for self-induced prenatal sex selection abortion. Demographers warn in *Missing Girls: A Globalizing Issue* that the systemic elimination of girls before their birth is the most extreme symptom of women's contemporary undervaluation.

The identification of a girl in the womb followed by her termination combined with boy child preference is the beginning of the pernicious failure of social protection systems. Women's and girls' progress in education and employment opportunities are likely to be affected due to the increasing threat of violence against women and girls in public and private spaces, impacting achievement of the SDGs.

Prenatal sex selection is increasingly not confined to countries in Asia but is evident in imbalanced sex ratios in several countries in Eastern Europe including Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Montenegro, and Albania, and among ethnic groups around the world. The resulting challenges present serious social and economic implications impacting women's and girls' lives and well-being.

The Beijing Platform for Action recognized prenatal sex selection as violence and discrimination against girls and women and urged governments to prevent and eliminate it. The failure to provide social protection to girls in the earliest stages of life not only results in violence against women and girls throughout the life cycle, but also hinders social and economic development.

The Beijing Platform also recognized that son preference not only discriminates against girls and limits access to food, education and health care but to even life itself. While efforts to ensure girls' access to food, education and health care have benefitted by nearly universal agreement since Beijing, social protection policies to ensure that

girls have universal access to life itself have been stymied by a global failure to embrace consistent non-discriminatory protection of girls beginning at the earliest stages of life.

The need for social protection is also especially critical for the unborn child who is diagnosed with a disability and whose life is devalued based on subjective views. Such exclusion is evident in State-sponsored maternal health programs that emphasize prenatal screenings for impairment followed by abortion when there is possibility of disability, especially in the case of Down syndrome, and in the pronouncements by States that there are nearly zero births of infants with Down syndrome. These actions reinforce the fatal discrimination that selectively ends the lives of children with trisomy 21 and perpetuates negative stigma against an entire group of people.

The failure of States to offer social inclusion to unborn children diagnosed with disabilities and to offer special assistance to their mothers and fathers rather than elimination of their child perpetuates inequality and casts preborn children with a disability as burdens to families and society. Such failure to embrace this excluded group of children jeopardizes efforts to overcome the prejudice, stigma, and negative stereotypes against persons with disabilities and perpetuates a discrimination that fails to protect and provide social inclusion to children subjectively deemed to be imperfect bolstering the falsehood that individuals with an impairment are considered to be unworthy of life.

Subjective discrimination for any reason negatively impacts respect for the right to life of all and renders the human dignity and worth of a human being contingent upon the subjective opinion of others. Priests for Life believes that such reckless disregard for the lives of society's weakest members subjectively denies a human being her or his right to life and perpetuates the perception that life is only for the perfect and that society is intolerant of those with an impairment regardless of their age, condition of dependency, or disability.

Social protection policies for impaired newborns are needed to ensure that impaired newborns do not become the victims of infanticide or abandonment but are afforded the same medical care as non-impaired newborns as well as given critical life-saving treatments when needed. The ending of the lives of children who exhibit physical imperfections at birth must be stopped by strong non-discriminatory social protection systems.

The right to life of each child ought to be respected and protected regardless of subjective views, the family's social and economic condition, the child's sex, or the presence or suspicion of a disability.

Governments exist to preserve and protect inherent rights of all human beings beginning with the right to life and beginning when life begins — at conception — and ending at natural death.

Elderly women are especially vulnerable to extreme poverty and in need of special social protection to ensure their safety and well-being. Individuals suffering from disability and those advanced in age are in need of social protection from abuse and from attempts at euthanasia or assisted suicide to induce death.

These vulnerable individuals are also likely to be living in poverty and challenged by physical illness, mental illness, dementia, or disease. The duty of government is to care for and preserve life, not make judgment calls and deliberately end a person's life.

Priests for Life believes that true equality and social inclusion requires social protection systems to ensure that no human being, from conception to natural death,

is denied their right to life. This includes baby girls in the womb who are marked for elimination because they are female and unborn children identified as having impairment, endangered from a discrimination that seeks their death through abortion. Disabled individuals, regardless of age, and the elderly suffering from illness or disease are also in need of social protection.

Priests for Life believes that life, in its most fragile state, is no less sacred than when it is in its healthiest and it is during life's most fragile state that social protection systems are needed most.